

What is claimed is:

1 1. A communication device comprising:
2 means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service providers
3 to gather information related to service offerings thereof;
4 means for obtaining a provider selection criterion associated with a user of said
5 communication device; and
6 means for selecting a service provider from said plurality of wireless network
7 access service providers to provide wireless access to a network for said
8 communication device based on said provider selection criterion and said information.

1 2. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for interrogating includes means for wirelessly transmitting a
3 separate interrogation signal for each of said plurality of wireless network access
4 service providers.

1 3. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for interrogating includes means for wirelessly transmitting a
3 separate interrogation signal for each of said plurality of wireless network access
4 service providers, said separate interrogation signal including an identifier uniquely
5 identifying a corresponding service provider.

1 4. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said information includes information related to a cost of service offered by a
3 first wireless network access service provider.

1 5. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said information includes information related to a connection performance
3 available from a first wireless network access service provider.

1 6. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said information includes information related to a per user bandwidth available
3 from a first wireless network access service provider.

1 7. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service
3 providers includes means for measuring a connection bandwidth associated with a first
4 wireless network access service provider.

1 8. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for interrogating a plurality of wireless network access service
3 providers includes means for requesting a relatively short duration connection from a
4 first wireless network access service provider to allow a connection bandwidth of said
5 first wireless network access service provider to be measured by said communication
6 device.

1 9. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for
3 retrieving said provider selection criterion from a memory within said communication
4 device.

1 10. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for
3 prompting a user of said communication device for said provider selection criterion
4 using an input/output device.

1 11. The communication device of claim 1, wherein:
2 said means for obtaining a provider selection criterion includes means for
3 reading said provider selection criterion from a removable memory card.

1 12. The communication device of claim 11, wherein:
2 said means for reading includes means for reading said provider selection
3 criterion from a subscriber identification module (SIM).

1 13. A method for procuring wireless access to a network for a communication
2 device, comprising:
3 identifying a plurality of network access service providers that are currently
4 servicing a present location of the communication device;
5 interrogating said plurality of network access service providers for information
6 using a wireless interrogation signal; and
7 selecting a service provider from said plurality of network access service
8 providers based on said information and a selection criterion.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 identifying a plurality of network access service providers includes transmitting
3 at least one inquiry signal and receiving response signals from at least two network
4 access service providers.

1 15. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal including an
4 identifier uniquely identifying said first network access service provider.

1 16. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting
4 information related to a cost of service associated with said first network access service
5 provider.

1 17. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting
4 information related to a quality of service available from said first network access
5 service provider.

1 18. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 interrogating includes transmitting a first wireless interrogation signal to a first
3 network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation signal requesting
4 information related to a per user bandwidth associated with said first network access
5 service provider.

1 19. The method of claim 13, comprising:
2 retrieving said selection criterion from a memory within said communication
3 device for use in selecting said service provider.

1 20. The method of claim 13, comprising:
2 obtaining said selection criterion from said user via an input/output device
3 associated with said communication device.

1 21. The method of claim 13, wherein:
2 said selection criterion is user-specified.

1 22. A computer readable medium having program instructions stored thereon for
2 performing, when executed within a digital processing device, a method for procuring
3 wireless access to a network, said method comprising:
4 interrogating a plurality of network access service providers for information
5 relating to service offerings; and
6 selecting a service provider from said plurality of network access service
7 providers based on said information and a selection criterion.

1 23. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein:

2 interrogating includes causing a first wireless interrogation signal to be
3 transmitted to a first network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation
4 signal requesting information related to a cost of service associated with said first
5 network access service provider.

1 24. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein:

2 interrogating includes causing a first wireless interrogation signal to be
3 transmitted to a first network access service provider, said first wireless interrogation
4 signal requesting information related to a quality of service available from said first
5 network access service provider.

1 25. The computer readable medium of claim 22, wherein said method includes:

2 identifying a plurality of network access service providers that are currently
3 active in a location before interrogating.

1 26. A communication device comprising:

2 a wireless transceiver to transmit communication signals into and receive
3 communications signals from a wireless communication channel via at least one
4 antenna; and

5 a mobile client to procure wireless access to a network for the communication
6 device, said mobile client including:

7 an interrogation function to interrogate a plurality of network access
8 service providers that are active in a vicinity of said communication device
9 using interrogation signals transmitted by said wireless transceiver, said
10 interrogation function receiving information from said plurality of network
11 access service providers in response to said interrogation signals; and

12 a selection function to select a service provider from said plurality of
13 network access service providers based on said information received by said
14 interrogation function and a provider selection criterion.

1 27. The communication device of claim 26, comprising:
2 a memory to store said provider selection criterion, wherein said selection
3 function retrieves said provider selection criterion from said memory for use in
4 selecting said service provider.

1 28. The communication device of claim 26, wherein:
2 said selection function prompts a user of said communication device for said
3 provider selection criterion using an input/output device of said communication device.

1 29. The communication device of claim 26, wherein:
2 said mobile client further includes an identification function for identifying said
3 plurality of network access service providers that are active in said vicinity of said
4 communication device for use by said interrogation unit.

1 30. The communication device of claim 26, comprising:
2 a memory including a list of network access service providers that provide
3 network access services to the public, said plurality of network access service providers
4 that are active in said vicinity of said communication device representing a subset of
5 said service providers on said list.

1 31. The communication device of claim 30, wherein:
2 said list of network access service providers includes a radio network name for
3 each of said network access service providers.